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ABSTRACT

The present study examined: (1) the relationship between the number and types of occupational barriers perceived by college students and their current levels of career development; and (2) gender and ethnic differences in the types of barriers perceived. Participants (129 women and 59 men) responded to open-ended questions about perceived barriers to occupational goals and completed measures (Career Development Inventory, Career Maturity Inventory, Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale) of career decision-making (CDM) attitudes, knowledge of CDM principles, and CDM self-efficacy. Results generally indicated the absence of relationships between the number and types of barriers cited by participants and their current levels of career development. Analyses did reveal a significant relationship, however, between the number of future career-related barriers and CDM self-efficacy. Results also indicated that a larger proportion of women in the sample reported the perception of family-related barriers than men. Ethnic differences in the perception of barriers were also discovered. Findings are discussed in terms of their theoretical importance and practical significance. (Contains 25 references.) (Author/JE)

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Running head: PERCEIVED BARRIERS AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Gender and Ethnic Differences in the Perception of Barriers to Career Development

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Abstract

The present study examined (a) the relationship between the number and types of occupational barriers perceived by college students and their current levels of career development and (b) gender and ethnic differences in the types of barriers perceived. Participants (129 women and 59 men) responded to open-ended questions about perceived barriers to occupational goals and completed measures of career decision-making (CDM) attitudes (Crites, 1978a), knowledge of CDM principles (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981), and CDM self-efficacy (Taylor & Betz, 1983). Results generally indicated the absence of relationships between the number and types of barriers cited by participants and their current levels of career development. Analyses did reveal a significant relationship, however, between the number of future career-related barriers and CDM self-efficacy ($p<.05$). Results also indicated that a larger proportion of women in the sample reported the perception of family-related barriers than men. Ethnic differences in the perception of barriers were also discovered. Findings are discussed in terms of their theoretical importance and practical significance.

Gender and Ethnic Differences in the Perception of Barriers to Career Development

Over the past several years, a number of career counselors have addressed the role that perceived barriers to career development play in the career decision-making (CDM) process. Crites (1969) referred to career-related barriers as thwarting conditions that could be either externally-derived frustrations (e.g., a low wage for services) or internally-based conflicts (e.g., a poor self-concept). Implicit in Crites's (1969) conceptualization is the notion that barriers to career development somehow interfere with the CDM process. Farmer (1976) extended Crites's ideas by identifying six internal or self-concept barriers and three environmental barriers that she described as potentially negative influences on the career motivation of women. Harmon (1977) also described career-related barriers (both psychological and sociological) in terms of their interfering influence upon career development. "For anyone making a career choice, the balance between external demands and internal factors is potentially conflict-ridden and deserves considerable attention in the counseling process" (Harmon, 1977, p. 198).

As Swanson and Tokar (1991) noted, perhaps the best model available for examining the role of perceived barriers to career development was provided by Gottfredson (1981). In her developmental theory of occupational aspirations, Gottfredson

presented the idea that one's self-concept and perceived accessibility of an occupation interact with one another and directly influence career decisions. Gottfredson referred to perceived accessibility as a person's judgments about the obstacles and opportunities she or he faces in the CDM domain. Her theory highlights the importance of an individual's recognition of and response to career-related barriers. Gottfredson (1981) hypothesized that as individuals realize and identify specific barriers (based on their perception of job accessibility) they will cope with this perceived reality by somehow compromising their vocational goals.

Through the process of compromising career goals because of perceived barriers, individuals might be likely to display attitudes toward the CDM process that reflect anxiety, concern, and a general lack of confidence. Their knowledge of CDM principles might also be negatively affected. Based on this assumption, perceptions of career-related barriers have been characterized as factors that erode students' self-confidence and complicate the career planning process (Greene-Black, 1988). It is probable that individuals who identify numerous occupational barriers might be more likely to display lower levels of career development than individuals who do not perceive as many barriers.

Results from recent investigations, however, question this premise (Luzzo, in press; Swanson & Tokar, 1991). Swanson and

Tokar's (1991) study of perceptions of barriers to career development revealed that college students perceive the existence of a number of occupational barriers. Swanson and Tokar argued, however, that assuming the perception of barriers negatively influences an individual's career development may be shortsighted. "Although Gottfredson (1981) hypothesized that confronting barriers leads to a compromise of one's goals, barriers may be perceived as a defeat to some individuals and as simply more of a challenge to others." (Swanson & Tokar, 1991, p. 104). Swanson and Tokar called for additional research designed to examine how perceptions of barriers relate to other career development variables (e.g., self-efficacy and career decision making).

More recently, in an exploratory investigation of gender and ethnic differences in the perception of barriers to career development, Luzzo (in press) discovered that women attending college perceived significantly more career-related barriers than men attending college, results that supported previous studies of gender differences in the perception of occupational barriers (DiBenedetto & Tittle, 1990; Wiersma, 1990). At the same time, however, the women who participated in the investigation exhibited greater knowledge of CDM principles and more adaptive attitudes toward career decision making. These results supported the notion that there are gender differences in the perception of career-related barriers and suggested, as argued by Swanson and

Tokar (1991), that the identification of career-related barriers may actually serve an adaptive purpose for some individuals by acting as a motivating force for more careful career planning and exploration.

Research has also revealed ethnic differences in the perception of barriers to career development (Luzzo, 1993). In an investigation of perceived barriers among college students, Luzzo discovered significant ethnic differences in the perception of ethnic identity barriers (e.g., discrimination on the basis of one's ethnic background or race), study skills barriers, and financial barriers to career attainment. Replication of these results is necessary to increase our understanding of the role that ethnicity and other cultural factors play in the career decision-making process.

The purposes of this study were to (a) examine the relationship between past and future career-related barriers and students' levels of CDM attitudes, CDM skills, and CDM self-efficacy and (b) analyze gender and ethnic differences in the perception of career-related barriers. The study was specifically designed to extend previous research in this domain in hopes of clarifying the role that perceived barriers play in the CDM process.

Method

Participants

Participants included 188 (129 women, 59 men) undergraduates

attending a large, Midwestern community college. Ages of the participants ranged from 18-45 (M = 24.87, SD = 7.47). The majority (86%) were Caucasian; other ethnic group representation included Asian Americans (7%), Hispanics (4%), and African Americans (3%). Most of the participants (70%) were in their first or second year of college. Students volunteered to participate in the study as part of an introductory psychology class exercise.

Materials

Measurement of CDM attitudes. Screening Form A-2 of the Career Maturity Inventory's (CMI) Attitude Scale (Crites, 1978a) was selected as a measure of CDM attitudes because of its widespread use as a measure of career maturity (Guthrie & Herman, 1982). The CMI is considered the most popular measure of career motivation and is used by career counselors and researchers alike (Savickas, 1984). The Attitude Scale includes 50 true-false items representing a variety of attitudes toward the CDM process. Higher scores indicate more highly developed attitudes toward career development and are related to vocational decidedness (Fuqua & Newman, 1989).

Crites (1978b) reported Kuder-Richardson (KR) 20 reliability coefficients ranging from .72 to .90 and test-retest reliability of .71 over a 1-year interval for the Attitude Scale. Despite concerns raised in the literature regarding the validity of the CMI (Westbrook, 1983), considerable support for the instrument's

validity has also been provided (Crites, 1978b; Savickas, 1990; Stowe, 1985).

Measure of knowledge of CDM principles. Knowledge of CDM principles was assessed using the Decision-Making Scale of the Career Development Inventory (CDI)--College and University Form (Super, Thompson, Lindeman, Jordaan, & Myers, 1981). The Decision-Making Scale measures one's knowledge of CDM principles by asking for responses to 20 hypothetical career dilemmas. For each question, respondents decide which of four alternatives is the best option to pursue. One point is awarded for each correct response, with higher scores indicating more knowledge of the principles that govern effective career decision making.

The CDI manual (Thompson & Lindeman, 1982) reports alpha coefficients for college women and men ranging from .60 to .82. Scores on the Decision-Making Scale relate moderately to various other measures of CDM knowledge and skills (Jepsen & Prediger, 1981).

Measure of CDM self-efficacy. The Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale (CDMSES) (Taylor & Betz, 1983) was used to measure each participant's current level of CDM self-efficacy. The CDMSES includes a list of 50 different CDM tasks. Respondents rate their confidence in their ability to complete each of the tasks successfully on a scale of no confidence (0) to complete confidence (9). A total score is determined by summing the confidence values. Higher scores indicate greater confidence

in making career-related decisions (i.e., higher scores indicate higher levels of CDM self-efficacy).

The CDMSES has exhibited strong psychometric properties, including high internal consistency reliability (Taylor & Betz, 1983) and generally high item-total score correlations (Robbins, 1985; Taylor & Betz, 1983). Adequate support for the construct, content, and criterion-related validity of the CDMSES has also been reported (Blustein, 1989; Taylor & Betz, 1983; Taylor & Popma, 1990).

Perceptions of barriers. Based on methodology employed in related investigations (Luzzo, 1993, in press), perceptions of barriers were determined by having each participant respond to two open-ended questions appearing on the first page of the survey packet: "(1) What barriers do you believe you have overcome to get to where you are today in terms of your career development? (2) What barriers do you believe you will have to overcome in the future to fully achieve your career aspiration?" Adequate space was available for participants to list all perceived barriers.

Demographic information. Additional information about participants (age, gender, ethnicity, and year in college) was obtained by asking for responses to various questions on the first page of the survey packet.

Procedure

All participants completed the packet of materials

(demographics questionnaire, CMI Attitude Scale, Decision-Making Scale of the CDI, and the CDMSES) in college classrooms in groups of 8 to 25. The career development measures were arranged in a counterbalanced order.

To reduce the chance of experimenter bias, two research assistants who were unaware of the study's purpose coded the responses to the barrier questions. Coding of barriers included calculating the actual number of barriers (both past and present) cited by each participant as well as determining the types of barriers included in participants' responses. Categories of barriers (i.e., barrier types) were preselected based on previous investigations of career-related barriers among college students (Luzzo, 1993, in press). Barrier types included family-related barriers (e.g., balancing work and family responsibilities, finding day care for children), study skills barriers (e.g., overcoming poor study habits, procrastination), ethnic identity barriers (e.g., dealing with job discrimination on the basis of race, differential treatment by teachers based on ethnic background), gender-identity barriers (e.g., expectation of job discrimination on the basis of gender), financial barriers (e.g., lack of funds for completion of education), and age-related barriers (e.g., expectation of discrimination based on one's age). The percentage of agreement between the two coders was over 94% for all content categories. Disagreements were discussed by the coders until a consensus was reached.

Data Analysis

Data were initially analyzed to determine whether gender and ethnic differences exist in terms of the number and types of barriers cited by participants. A series of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were then computed to determine the relationship between the number of barriers cited by each participant (both past and present) and their scores on the career development measures. Next, univariate analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were calculated (with gender and ethnicity as covariates) to test for relationships between the types of barriers perceived by participants and their assessed levels of career development.

Results

Gender Differences

Statistical analyses revealed that women and men perceived equal numbers of past and future barriers to career development [past barriers: women M = 1.17 (SD = 0 .73) and men M = 1.19 (SD = 0.84), $t(186)$ = 0.13; future barriers: women M = 1.12 (SD = 0.73) and men M = 1.15 (SD = 0.83), $t(186)$ = 0.30]. Chi-square analyses were conducted for each barrier type on the basis of gender. Results yielded the presence of a significant relationship between gender and the perception of past family-related barriers, χ^2 (1, N = 188) = 5.838, $p < .05$, with 23% of the women and only 8% of the men having indicated family-related barriers in the past. No other relationships between gender and

barrier type were found.

Ethnicity

Statistical analyses revealed the absence of any ethnic differences in terms of the numbers of past and future barriers to career development cited by participants [past barriers: F (3, 184) = 0.892, p >.05; future barriers: F (3, 184) = 1.843, p >.05. Chi-square analyses were conducted for each barrier type on the basis of ethnicity. As shown in Table 1, results yielded the presence of a significant relationship between ethnicity and the perceptions of past ethnic-related and study skills barriers as well as a relationship between ethnicity and future ethnic-related barriers. No other relationships between ethnicity and barrier type were found.

Perceived Barriers and Career Maturity

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were then computed to assess the relationship between the number of barriers cited by participants and their scores on the career development measures. As shown in Table 2, results revealed the absence of a significant relationship between the number of past career-related barriers and each of the career development measures employed in this study. Similarly, there were no relationships between the number of future career-related barriers and participants' CDM attitudes and knowledge of CDM principles. A significant, negative relationship was revealed, however, between CDM self-efficacy and the number of future

barriers perceived (r = -.17, p<.05). This inverse relationship indicates that the more future career-related barriers a student perceives, the lower her or his CDM self-efficacy score is likely to be.

Because the barriers were also coded by type, additional analyses were conducted to determine relationships between types of perceived barriers indicated by participants and the career development measures. A series of univariate ANCOVAs (with gender as the covariate) were calculated with the indication of the barrier type as the predictor variable and the career development measures as the criterion variables. As shown in Table 3, significant differences in CDM self-efficacy [F (1,181) = 5.340, p<.05] and CDM attitudes [F (1,181) = 4.108, p<.05] were found between participants who cited past family-related barriers and those who did not. Inspection of the data reveal that students who cited past family-related barriers exhibit higher levels of CDM self-efficacy (M = 373.57, SD = 47.48) and more mature CDM attitudes (M = 40.08, SD = 5.18) than their counterparts who do not perceive such barriers (CDM self-efficacy M = 354.46, SD = 53.13; CDM attitudes M = 38.63, SD = 4.30). All other relationships between types of barriers and career development were non-significant.

Discussion

The present findings generally support the claim that perceiving occupational barriers does not negatively influence

the career development of college students in any significant way. The lack of relationships between the number of past and future barriers perceived by participants and their levels of CDM attitudes and knowledge of CDM principles indicates that the perception of career-related barriers may not be as detrimental to the CDM process as earlier theorized (Crites, 1969; Gottfredson, 1981; Greene-Black, 1988).

The discovery of a significant, negative relationship between the number of perceived barriers to future career development and CDM self-efficacy makes intuitive sense. Findings indicate that college students who believe that they have several occupational barriers to overcome in the future are likely to exhibit lower levels of CDM self-efficacy (i.e., display less confidence in their ability to make career decisions) than students who do not envision as many barriers. Possible reasons for this relationship should be explored, especially in light of the results of studies linking CDM self-efficacy to a variety of adaptive career-related behaviors and attitudes (Blustein, 1989; Robbins, 1985; Taylor & Betz, 1983; Taylor & Popma, 1990). It is important to note that the observed relationship between CDM self-efficacy and the number of future barriers is a weak one (r = -.17). Although statistically significant, there is probably limited practical meaning to the observed relationship, further supporting the notion that perceived barriers do not appear to have a significantly negative

impact on the career development of college students. Nevertheless, findings do suggest that students who perceive many occupational barriers in the future might benefit from discussing ways to overcome such barriers in the process of making career decisions.

In terms of the observed relationship between gender and family-related barriers, results of this investigation support previous studies (DiBenedetto & Tittle, 1990; Luzzo, in press; Wiersma, 1990) indicating that women attending college cite barriers related to family issues (e.g., balancing the demands of work and family, securing daycare for children) more frequently than their male counterparts. Harmon (1977) argued, however, that issues related to combining a career and family should be explored with both women and men. Harmon's recommendation seems especially relevant in light of additional results of this investigation revealing that an equal proportion of women and men cited the perception of future family-related barriers.

Another interesting finding is that those who perceive past family-related barriers exhibit more mature attitudes toward the CDM process and higher levels of CDM self-efficacy than those who do not perceive such barriers. It would appear that college students who perceive that they have overcome family-related barriers in the past have developed more mature CDM attitudes and increased their confidence in their ability to make effective career decisions. Perhaps, as Swanson and Tokar (1991) argued,

barriers to career development are perceived as defeating to some individuals and as a motivating force to others. For some the perception of family-related barriers in particular may significantly interfere with the CDM process, whereas for others the same types of perceptions may serve as a catalyst for engaging in effective career exploration and decision making processes.

Ethnic differences revealed in this investigation included perceptions of past and future ethnic-related barriers as well as past study skills barriers. In terms of the perception of past ethnic-related barriers, 28% of African American students and 15% of Asian American students cited having experienced barriers in the past such as racial discrimination on the job and differential treatment by teachers on the basis of ethnic background. Only 2% of Caucasian students cited similar types of barriers, and no Hispanic students cited the perception of ethnic-related barriers of the past. A larger proportion of students perceive future ethnic-related barriers, with 43% of African American students and 23% of Asian American students citing such barriers. Again, fewer Caucasian (3%) and Hispanic (12%) students cited similar perceptions.

Perception of study skills barriers of the past were also related to ethnicity of the participants. Hispanic students (62%) were the most likely to cite the experience of overcoming study skills barriers in the past. A significant number of

African American (57%), Caucasian (50%), and Asian (31%) students, however, also cited these types of barriers.

Ethnic differences observed in this study are similar to those revealed in a previous investigation by Luzzo (1993) and emphasize the importance of considering ethnic and cultural differences in career counseling. College and university counseling centers must no longer operate on purely Eurocentric career counseling perspectives. Providing comprehensive counseling services to a diversified student body necessitates increased attention to the role of ethnicity and culture in the career development process.

Future investigations of the role that perceived barriers play in the CDM process should attempt to clarify the findings observed in this study. Exploration of the factors that determine differential responses to perceived barriers on the basis of gender and ethnicity and an attempt to discover ways to assist those whose barriers are perceived as insurmountable should continue. Examining the relationships between perceived barriers and other aspects of career development (e.g., career indecision, the development of vocational schema, career locus of control) would also be a logical extension to this research.

Most college students apparently identify at least some barriers to their pursuit of occupational goals (Swanson & Tokar, 1991). Learning how these perceptions interact with other career development variables and developing methods for effectively

coping with such barriers are endeavors worthy of empirical attention if we are to more fully understand and appreciate the multidimensional nature of the CDM process.

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Table 1

Percentages of Members from Each Ethnic Group Indicating the Perception of Ethnic-Related and Study Skills Barriers

Type of Barrier	Ethnic Group	Percentage Indicating the Perception	^{2} Value
Past Study Skills	African Americans	57%	29.39*
	Hispanics	62%	
	Asian Americans	31%	
	Caucasians	50%	
Past Ethnic-Related	African Americans	28%	36.87*
	Hispanics	0%	
	Asian Americans	15%	
	Caucasians	2%	
Future Ethnic-Related	African Americans	43%	18.21*
	Hispanics	12%	
	Asian Americans	23%	
	Caucasians	3%	

Note. df = 3 for all ^{2} values.

*p<.001.

Table 2

Correlational Matrix of Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	Range
1. No. of Past Career Barriers		.30*	.07	.02	.09	1.18	0.76	0-4
2. No. of Future Career Barriers	---		-.09	-.01	-.17*	1.13	0.76	0-4
3. CDM Attitudes		---		.34*	.45*	38.91	4.50	25-47
4. Knowledge of CDM Principles			---		.07	13.31	2.51	6-18
5. CDM Self-Efficacy				---		358.04	51.74	216-450

*$p < .05$

Table 3

Scores on Career Development Measures Based on the Perception of Past Family-Related Barriers

Career Development Measures		Perception of Past Family-Related Barriers? YES	NO	F Values
CDM Attitudes	M	40.08	38.63	4.108*
	SD	5.18	4.30	
Knowledge of CDM Principles	M	14.14	13.12	3.112
	SD	2.64	2.44	
CDM Self-Efficacy	M	373.57	354.46	5.340*
	SD	47.48	53.13	

*$p<.05$